



Body Image and Feelings About How You Look

You may be having some concerns with changes in your physical appearance that are an expected part of adjusting to cancer and its treatment. Some of these changes will be temporary and some may be more long-lasting. Talk with your health care team about what body changes you can expect, any worries you have about your current appearance and possible tips for managing these changes.

The loss of body parts, hair loss, scars, weight gain or loss, lymphedema and other body changes following a cancer diagnosis and treatment can sometimes leave you feeling sad, angry and less self-confident than usual. These feelings are normal and understandable. You may feel that people look at or treat you differently. Others may ask questions or make comments about the way you look. Take some time to think about how you will respond. If you don't want to talk about it, it is fine to tell people it is a private matter. If you are having a hard time with the emotions that can come with these changes, find someone to talk to—your doctor, nurse, oncology social worker, fellow cancer patient or consider joining a support group to learn how others cope with changes in their appearance.

Weight Gain or Loss

Gaining or losing weight as a result of treatment is quite common. Slight increases or decreases in weight during cancer treatment are usually not a problem. However, gaining a lot of weight or losing a lot of weight may affect your health and ability to undergo treatment. Staying physically active can help with both weight gain and loss. Talk with your health care team and or a registered dietitian if you are concerned about your weight. Some cancer programs and community organizations have exercise or activity programs. Ask your health care team if they can recommend a program in your area.

Hair Loss

Hair loss can be a very upsetting experience for many people. It is normal to be upset about the loss of your hair and how it affects your appearance. Not all cancer treatment will cause hair loss and in most cases your hair will grow back. Wigs and toupees, scarves and hats are some options that people use. Others embrace their baldness for a period of time and feel comfortable as they are. You need to do what feels right to you.

Changes in Your Skin

Some types of treatments (chemotherapy, radiation or biologic therapy) can cause changes in the condition of your skin. You might also notice that you are more sensitive to the sun than usual. Be sure to wear sunscreen, even in winter. Most of these changes are not serious and will get better but you should report any changes you notice to your health care team immediately.

Please know that there is support to help you feel better about how you look. The American Cancer Society has a program called *Look Good, Feel Better*® that is offered for women, teens and men at various locations nationwide. Visit www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org or call 1-800-395-LOOK to talk with someone or to find a class near you.

